

UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER GROUP IN CENTRAL AMERICA **(ONUCA)**

Location

Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua

Headquarters

Tegucigalpa (Honduras)

Duration

December 1989 - to date

Current strength

132 military observers

Chief military observer

Brigadier-General Víctor Suanzes Pardo (Spain)

Historical Background

The turmoil in Central America has been a matter of grave concern to the international community for many years. It aroused alarm particularly among the Latin American countries and prompted various peace initiatives. These initiatives were actively supported by the United Nations. After complex and difficult negotiations, the Presidents of the five Central American countries--Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua--signed a series of agreements in which they formulated the principal elements for a peaceful solution to the problems confronting the region. They also called on the United Nations to establish mechanisms for observing and verifying the commitments which they had undertaken and for assisting them in their efforts to achieve peace in the region.

Establishment of ONUCA

ONUCA was established by Security Council resolution 644 (1989) on 7 November 1989, following a request from the five Central American Governments. Its original mandate was to verify these countries' compliance with their security undertakings, in the Esquipulas II Agreement of 1987, to cease aid to

irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the region and not to allow their territory to be used for attacks on other States. Originally,

ONUCA's authorized military strength included 260 military observers and related support personnel.

ONUCA's advance party arrived in the region on 2 December 1989. The Group has its headquarters in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and liaison offices in the capitals of the five Central American countries. The military observers are deployed in verification centres and smaller operational patrol posts which have been also set up throughout the region.

ONUCA's Activities

In fulfilment of ONUCA's mandate, mobile teams of observers carry out regular patrols by road vehicles, by helicopters and, in the Gulf of Fonseca and certain other coastal areas and rivers, by patrol boats and light speedboats. The mobile teams also make spot checks on their own initiative and undertake ad hoc inspections to investigate allegations of violations. Monitoring is concentrated on sensitive border areas where violations of the Esquipulas II security undertakings are most likely to occur.

Developments in Nicaragua, following the UN-supervised elections there on 25 February 1990, brought about two enlargements of ONUCA's mandate. On 27 March 1990, the Security Council authorized an enlargement of the mandate and the addition of armed personnel to ONUCA's strength to enable the Group to play a part in the voluntary demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance. Accordingly, ONUCA was temporarily enlarged to include a 700-strong infantry battalion from Venezuela. On 21 April 1990, the Council authorized a further expansion of the mandate to enable ONUCA to monitor a cease fire and the separation of forces agreed by the Nicaraguan parties as part of the demobilization process.

The demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance, which had commenced at La Kiatara, Honduras, on 16 April 1990, was essentially completed on 28 June



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1990, although individuals and small groups belonging to the resistance continued to present themselves to be demobilized until 6 July. During the entire period more than 22,000 members of the resistance were demobilized in Nicaragua and Honduras and their weapons destroyed. Following the successful completion of the demobilization process, the Venezuelan battalion was withdrawn and ONUCA reverted to its original mandate and concept of operations.

In October 1990, after consultations with the five Central American Governments, the Secretary-General recommended to the Security Council an extension of ONUCA's mandate for a further period of six months. At the same time, in light of developments in the region, he proposed to close some of the verification centres whose tasks had been primarily related to the Nicaraguan conflict and to reduce the number of military observers to 158. On 5 November 1990, the Security Council agreed to the Secretary-General's recommendations.

In his next report to the Security Council, in April 1991, the Secretary-General recommended, and the Council subsequently concurred, that the military strength of ONUCA could be further reduced, without impairing its ability to carry out the mandate assigned to it.

In recent months ONUCA's activities have been focused, more directly than in the past, on liaison and contacts with the armed forces of the five Central

American Governments. Also, added emphasis is being placed on close contacts with the national authorities responsible for border control and security. These activities are designed to enhance ONUCA's capacity to fulfil its mandate and reflect the fact that ONUCA's role is limited to verifying that each of the five Governments complies with its undertakings, whereas full responsibility for detecting and preventing activities violating the Agreements rests with the five Governments themselves.

Current Composition and Deployment

In November 1991, ONUCA comprised 132 military observers from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Venezuela. It also included 32 naval personnel from Argentina and a civilian air wing.

ONUCA's current deployment consists of a central headquarters at Tegucigalpa, liaison offices at each of the five capitals (San José, San Salvador, Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa and Managua), three verification centres outside the capitals and eight operational patrol posts.

Financial Aspects

The cost of ONUCA's operation for a current six-month mandate period, i.e. until 30 April 1992, will be approximately \$15 million. At the beginning of October 1991, unpaid assessed contributions to the ONUCA Special Account amounted to some \$9.6 million, representing 11.6 per cent of the total sum assessed since the inception of the Group.